

Hearing on the Benefits of Expanding U.S. Agriculture Trade and Eliminating Barriers to U.S. Exports

Tuesday, June 14, 2016, 10 a.m.
1100 Longworth House Office Building

Opening Statement of Charles B. Rangel

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As I see it, there are at least two ways for us to help our farmers and ranchers access foreign markets.

One way is by negotiating international trade agreements – agreements where foreign countries agree to reduce or eliminate barriers to our exporters, in exchange for us reducing or eliminating barriers to their products.

But as in any negotiation, we need to go into trade negotiations with our eyes wide open. We need to know when these trade agreements create real opportunities for our farmers and ranchers and when they create paper opportunities. Too often in the past, we have negotiated agreements to eliminate one barrier our exporters face – only to find that another barrier has taken its place. And I am particularly concerned about steps the Canadian

government has taken recently that would make it harder for New Yorker dairy farmers to access that market.

We also need to make sure we have the tools and resources to fully enforce and take advantage of our trade agreements. For example, our food safety inspectors need more resources to ensure that our imports are safe. And, as I've said for many years, we need to invest in ourselves to make sure we can win in the competitive global marketplace. That means investments in things like infrastructure and education, above all.

But in some cases we don't have to go to the trouble of negotiating an international agreement in order to help our farmers and ranchers export to foreign markets. In some cases, it isn't foreign governments that restrict access to foreign markets, it's the U.S. Congress.

Just three months ago, President Obama visited Cuba to advance the normalization of relations with that country. It was the first visit of a U.S. President to Cuba in almost 90 years, and I was very proud to be part of the delegation. Proud to be an American.

I have consistently pushed for my Free Trade with Cuba Act since 1993, to allow all Americans to visit the island, enable

Americans and Cubans to conduct business together, and to list restrictions on humanitarian assistance. And you can bet I'm going to push for that bill today because I know how much it would help our farmers and ranchers.

The International Trade Commission recently estimated that U.S. agricultural exports to Cuba would grow by almost half a billion dollars if the United States lifted its restrictions. And a former Secretary of Agriculture from the Reagan Administration has estimated that the increase could be closer to a billion dollars. I am looking forward to hearing more about that from our witnesses.

I will conclude my opening remarks here. I look forward to hearing the testimony of our witnesses.